UNITED
NATIONS

TD

United Nations Conference
on Trade and Development

Distr.
LIMITED

TD/B/39(1)/L.6
9 October 1992

Original: ENGLISH

TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD
Thirty-ninth session
First part
Geneva, 28 September 1992
Agenda item 5

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INCLUDING UNCTAD'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF UNCED'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summing-up by the Vice-President,
Mr. Gian Nath (Mauritius)

Mr. President, I am honoured to have the privilege of presenting to you my summing-up of the informal discussions which you kindly asked me to convene on the issue of sustainable development.

Mr. President, in these informal discussions, we took into consideration the introductory statement made by the Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD and the statements made by several delegations on this item in plenary. We were also fortunate to have with us to animate our discussions Mr. Nitin Desai, Deputy Secretary-General and Officer-in-Charge of UNCED, as well as contributions from staff members of the UNCTAD secretariat.

92-52557

Mr. Desai gave us an impassioned and illuminating view of the meaning of sustainable development seen from the perspective of development. He emphasised the asset management perspective of sustainable development and - filling an important gap in our discussions to date - focussed on what measures were necessary at the national level to bring about movement towards sustainable development. He also reminded us that, as the Cartagena Commitment had rightly emphasised, a global partnership with shared but differentiated responsibility was necessary if national efforts were to bear fruit, as the developing countries needed financial support to make the transition to sustainable development.

The UNCTAD staff members presented to us the wide range of work already undertaken by the UNCTAD secretariat on specific issues within its mandate related to sustainable development. They focussed on work carried out in the fields of natural resource management; the reconciliation of trade measures with environmental concerns (and vice versa); and the development of market-based instruments for financing environmental protection.

Although we were pressed for time, a lively debate was engaged, and views were expressed on both the orientation and the content of the future work of the secretariat in the area of sustainable development. Although there was a large degree of consensus on these matters, views differed on the likely effects of the adoption and use of tradeable carbon emission permits at the international level and on the appropriateness of further work on this matter using UNCTAD's regular budgetary resources.

I would not wish here to summarise our discussions in any further detail. However, I believe that it would be correct to say that the following views were broadly held:

- that sustainable development is such an important issue that UNCTAD's intergovernmental machinery and the secretariat should integrate yet more thoroughly the concept of sustainable development and its environmental dimension into their respective programmes of work; and in particular that concrete work on areas related to sustainable development within UNCTAD's mandate should be pursued without losing momentum whilst avoiding duplication with work in other relevant institutions, necessary adjustments always being possible at a later date to take account of future decisions by the General Assembly. Some delegations were, however, of the view that such work should proceed prudently whilst awaiting the establishment of the Committee on Sustainable Development and any possible allocation of tasks arising therefrom;

- that those subsidiary bodies whose terms of reference contain areas of work related to sustainable development should assign high priority to such work, particularly as regards the sound management of natural resources (Committee on Commodities); the linkages between poverty alleviation and sustainable development (Committee on Poverty Alleviation); and the generation, transfer and diffusion of environmentally sound technologies (Ad Hoc Working Group on Interrelationship between Investment and Technology Transfer);

- that work in the Board on sustainable development - initially in a Sessional Committee, but with the option open to move to a different structure (Standing Committee or Ad Hoc Working Group) if the situation warranted - should initially concentrate on the important area of the reconciliation of environmental and trade policies, including the necessity to ensure that environmental measures do not become an instrument of protection; and

- that the secretariat should continue or undertake studies on the interlinkages of trade and environment in order to serve the Sessional Committee, and on:

- methods for the internalisation of environmental costs into the prices of all products;
- economic and regulatory tools to correct market deficiencies without hampering economic growth and development or jeopardising competitive positions on international markets;
- market-based instruments for financing environmental protection;
- the implications for developing countries of basic principles designed to foster economic behaviour more in line with the imperatives of sustainable development;
- the linkages between poverty alleviation and sustainable development; and
- ways and means of promoting sustainable development at the national level, ensuring positive linkages between technological, sectoral and macroeconomic policies.

Mr. President, that concludes my report. I hope that I have faithfully reflected the views presented in our informal discussion, and that the Board will take due note of this report in its work. Thank you.